

RUNNING and RIDING for a living



Life with Perth's Duathlon Man

99% of people in multi-sport ask why I don't just swim and do Triathlon? The simple answer is that if you can run fast enough, you simply don't need too!

If you can run and bike fast, or simply don't have the time or inclination to swim, you don't need water to find your racing outlet in Europe. More personally, duathlon is a great physical challenge and if I keep working to the very best of my ability in training I can envisage myself as World Champion. That fires me up and gets me out the door twice everyday to train.

Pro Life.....Training and Racing in France

The majority of Elite Duathletes race in the French Grand Prix system for a club which is aligned with a French town (or ville in France). The town will have a recreational budget, part of which is assigned to a sport, or sports, that the Ville wishes to support or use to promote itself. The

club will also receive funding from the department (or State) in which it is located and receive Prize Money from the French Triathlon Federation based on end of year rankings. This system provides most of the support for smaller sports like Triathlon, Athletics, Duathlon, Amateur cycling and so on, who fail to attract mainstream media attention. In Duathlon, each Club has 5 members for each of the 5 Grand Prix Races in the French Grand Prix Series and the top 3 athletes in each team have their finishing positions added up. The lowest score wins and teams are classified from 1st to 15th. Over the course of the season, points from each round are added to decide the "French Club Champion".

The clubs and not the race organisers, pay the athletes at each race and cover the costs of transport to and from the race (from within Europe), accommodation, race entry, uniforms and meals on the race weekend. For the bigger Triathlon teams, it is not uncommon for a World Champion to receive appearance fees of 10,000 Euro (AUD \$16,500) per Grand Prix (which is televised in France), whereas in Duathlon the highest paid athlete receives around 2500 Euro (AUD \$4250) per Grand Prix.

As an example of a "normal" training and race week, I will discuss the week before my final French Grand Prix race in Chamount. My wife, Lianne and son, Sebastian had just headed back to Oz so I was riding solo for the last week of the trip. I had just done a race in Spiez, Switzerland. After the race, I traveled immediately 2.5 hours back to the Swiss/French border at Basel and stayed the night with the family of Swiss Cannondale Manager, Cedric Hasenfratz.

The Swiss food and hospitality is always first class and the training is incredible. Clean and fresh air, beautiful lakes, rolling hills (or mountains if you want them) and awesome natural running trails (without cement).

I couldn't do too much training though as I was up early the next morning and spent 11 hours on the train in transit back to my French home in the middle of the country, Clermont Ferrand. The train can be mind numbing if you don't bring your own book, computer or magazine.....Sebastian had short circuited my computer long ago with an ill directed toilet stop during "nappy off time" and I forgot my magazines, so it was a very long, slow trip staring blankly out the window and day



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dreaming. The most exciting thing was trying to avoid the train conductor and getting charged an extra 20 Euro for my bike!

Once back to France, it was 6 days till the next race. As I was essentially back in base training for the World Championships in September, my volume was quite high. For the last 3 weeks of the campaign, each week I would get one long ride (3-4 hours), 1 long run (1hr 45), 1 sharp run session (20 min WU and CD plus 20 minutes of fartlek 1:1 work recovery), 1 sharp bike (30 min WU and CD plus 30 min 1:1 ratios) and the rest of my sessions were easy 1 hour runs and 1.5-2.5hr bikes. I train twice everyday, except Friday, where I skip riding.

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If I have any advice for young West Australian du/triathletes it is that you need to look beyond the local scene to get insight into the training required to be a world class athlete. The culture of racing and training here is very much participation based—which is fantastic for the critical mass—however it can be extremely limiting for a youngster who is green to the possibilities that are available if they are willing to work harder and dream of more.

The guys I train with in Clermont Ferrand are friends from my first French Club, Montlucon. They are all Professional athletes or Uni Students and are great company, as well as great athletes. I need to learn more French and I think the boys are starting to hint that I should pull my finger out and do a course this summer. Between training, there is lots of food shopping, playing in the park, cooking, coffees, midday sleeps and ensuring energy expenditure is minimized. The weeks go relatively quickly, especially with Sebastian around to play with and take for his "Babycino" when Lianne needs a break. It is also great that everything is so close in Europe and North Africa,

so in quiet weeks it is easy to get away with Lianne and Sebastian and we did two trips during this tour—one to Morocco for some culture and the other to Munich for some indulgence.

By Friday afternoon, it was back to game time and I departed Clermont Ferrand and headed up to Paris, before connecting to Chamount for the weekend race. I had learnt my lesson and was more prepared for this trip and had plenty of old French triathlon mags to read. Our team has a reasonable budget so our hotel on arrival in Chamount was a 3 star abode and we always team up with a room mate for each race in twin share. The food served at lunch and dinner always seems to be pasta with tomato sauce and cheese plus a heap of baguettes. Never much variation and certainly not Michelin Star material, but perfect pre race nutrition. For this event, I was with Belgian Nic D'Harveng who is an emerging tri/duathlete with a killer run. The rest of our team was 2*World Long Distance Champion, Joerie Vansteelant plus 2*World Junior Champion, Sergio Silva and French Tri/Duathlete and strongman on the bike, Tommy Degham

If you have ever seen a critical mass of young French/ Belgian men, they tend to be a little bit more conservative and appear more polished than their Aussie counterparts, fortunately that is all superficial and I manage to quickly pull them into line and get the topic back in the gutter. It is always great fun with a good group of team mates and it is a really enjoyable time pre and post race just chilling out and getting ready to compete.

The night before the race, we trialed our team formation for the bike and things went smoothly, after dinner we then had a rev up from our Manager, Patrick Sanchez. Patrick is a passionate guy and loves Duathlon, I really enjoy working with him and he treats his athletes with respect and professionalism. The proof of this is the caliber of athletes who race in the Mulhouse colours and have won so many titles for the club.

The next morning is race day. In France, most races are conducted in the early afternoon and get a good crowd of interested supporters and curious locals seeing what all the fuss is about. In this race,

the teams go off from lowest ranked to highest ranked, so we are off second to last. We are aiming for nothing more than a victory to try and catch leading club Marville in the season rankings.

Once the gun fires, we are straight onto 2.55 per km pace with Sergio Silva (29.20 10k runner) pushing the pace. Once on the bike, we are immediately up to high speed and Sergio and Nic are dropped within 1km. 3 athletes have to cross the line together to record the Team time, so we quickly assess the situation and make a quick decision to keep going. Tommy was absolutely incredible on the bike, as we averaged 46.5 km/hr on a rolling course and got onto the final run with a 50 second lead over all other times. We got to enjoy the last run and celebrate a great victory.

One of the strange adaptations at peak racing fitness is how the experience becomes almost automatic, some people call it the "Zone", normally the only thing that clicks you out is the finish line or a transition which requires increased concentration or effort—this race was strange because I never got out of the pocket because we didn't need too sprint and had to actually cross the line all together. In that way, it was a great way to finish the trip, taking a win without having a gut wrenching sprint finish.

Unfortunately, the post race celebrations were short lived, as we were immediately taken off for Drug Testing. Basically, your supervisor is with you from the moment you are informed of the test, till after it is completed, so it is like having a shadow. I always try to drink as much fluid as possible immediately so I can get my testing finished before anyone else. Today it was particularly important to get in and out first as my train was leaving in 2 hours to take me straight to Paris Charles De Gaulle Airport for my flight home to Lianne and Sebastian.

Hope that gives some insight into the life of an athlete racing in France....

Raf Baugh
www.rafaelbaugh.com